

PARTISAN WELFARE – Group phantasy as social infrastructure

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I feel the pulse of the activity of the future city that those on my side are building is alive in their conscience. And in it, the social chain does not rest on a few; nothing of what happens in it is a matter of luck, nor the product of fate, but the intelligent work of the citizens. Nobody in it is looking from the window of the sacrifice and the drain of a few. Alive, I am a partisan. That is why I hate the ones that don't take sides, I hate the indifferent.” -- Antonio Gramsci.

While Franco Bifo Berardi wrote that “during the decades of culmination of modernity, we considered Nazism a past, extinct phenomenon, erased from history” (Berardi 2015), and the intellectuals of his generation had moved on to focus on the more sophisticated forms of structural violence under capitalist democracy, it is becoming increasingly clear that right wing populism is not going to be a transient phenomenon. It is also exposing the fragility of cultural practices that still depend so much on the infrastructural resources of the social democratic state and liberal capitalism. The current rise of an aggressive far right discourse calls for a revision of the practices, modes and figures of resistance. Across the current debates that are critically unfolding on this issue, it seems clear that a fragility of the imaginary accompanies all of them. By this, I mean a sense of a lack of firm antecedents able to lend to current movements any process of figuration capable of anchoring their narrations. In other words, what appears to be lacking is the process that Isabel Stengers has called ‘dramatization’, or a speculative process that understands “that the jump is not only toward, that it cannot be dissociated from the ground it leaves.” (Stengers 2012, 203). As it will become clear, it is precisely this relatedness between the jump and the ground that the I intend to explore using the partisan as a guiding figure.

PARTISANS

It seems to me that one of the realms in which such a shift is presenting itself, in the European region at least, is in a re-orientation of the collective imaginary away from the 1960s and 1970s - well captured by the symbols, figures and mythologies of French May 1968 and the long Italian 1977 – and towards a newfound interest for the figure of the partisan. The figure of the partisan is currently enjoying a rambunctious moment of popularity in cultural production. To borrow a significant example from popular visual culture, for instance, in the aftermath of the presidential elections in USA an unknown activist punched right-wing extremist Richard Spencer, sparking the '*punch a Nazi*' meme, of which endless variations circulated on social media. Many of these made use of popular images of fighters attacking German Nazis from the WWII period, such as Indiana Jones punching a Nazi officer in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* or Captain America punching Hitler.

That the figure of the partisan would be gaining some traction in the collective imaginary during the present moment comes as no surprise, as new and old fascist formations are proliferating everywhere. In what follows, I'd like to explore the possibility of activating this figure as a carrier of a slightly different imaginary, one that explores the figure of the partisan as the carrier of an affective and imaginary response to the globalised principle of government that, as the Invisible Committee described, is currently being modelled after "counterinsurgency" techniques (The Invisible Committee 2014, 10), which far from being confined to military strategies are being deployed to increasingly force civil society to perform policing functions, turning onto itself. This tendency is testified, for instance, by the numerous schemes that are asking civilian civil servants and workers to carry out policing functions on the users of their services, as in UK's government Prevent scheme, which makes it a legal requirement for teachers to report students whom they deem at risk of 'radicalisation' to the authorities (opposed by the campaign Prevent Prevent); or the Italian government's newly introduced requirements for social workers to treat illegal migrants as criminals (opposed by the campaign #IoDiserto); or the equivalent measures being combated by the Sanctuary Cities' movement in the USA, just to name a few. Following the Invisible Committee and Michel Foucault, thus, the present increase of openly discriminatory and repressive measures within social provisions can be usefully thought in terms of a "civil war", a war on the poor, that is in fact not a state of exception, but indeed "the matrix of all the power struggles, of all the power strategies and, consequently, the matrix of all the struggles over and against power" and at the same time, "it is also the process through and by which a certain number of new collectivities that had not seen the light of day constitute themselves" (Foucault 2015 [1973], 13).

Many political thinkers have written on the figure of the partisan in order to articulate their vision of resistance. In a recent book, Howard Caygill gave an overview of some of these, spanning from Lenin's 1906 article on 'Partisan War' to Carl Schmitt's *Theory of the Partisan* (1963). In both accounts, the partisan emerges as a figure linked to a proposition of rootedness in a specific territory. For Lenin, "partisan resistance marks an intermediate phase between local struggle and world revolution" (Caygill 2013, 104). For Schmitt, who surveys a broad range of partisan struggles, from the historical, such as the Spanish resistance to Napoleon or the Greek war of independence, to the more recent anti-colonial resistances of Ho Chi Minh and Nguyen Giap in Vietnam or Castro and Guevara in Cuba, the figure of the partisan can be sketched out through four basic characteristics. The first three are: irregularity (the guerrilla's undertaking is outside the rule of law); a high degree of mobility; and a strong political engagement. But it is the fourth that appears particularly relevant for our discussion, as the fourth trait of the partisan is, for Schmitt, its 'telluric' force, that is, the fact that this figure is rooted in a territory. Within Schmitt's political theory, situatedness is particularly significant, as it is what allow him to mark the difference between the partisan and the terrorist, a distinction that Caygill usefully summarizes as consisting of "the transformation of the real concrete enemy into the absolute and abstract enemy" (110). Moreover, the telluric attachment is also crucial for Schmitt in "developing his new concepts of the political in which sovereignty is replaced by resistance" (107).

Thus, the figure of the partisan in political theory can be said to have been principally deployed used in two different ways. On the one hand, it describes someone who takes a side, politically, someone who makes a choice. A second significance of the term refers to those who engage in acts of guerrilla and sabotage within an enemy-occupied territory. In this sense, partisans do not need share an identical political ideology, but they are commonly attached to a specific locale via complex bonds of reciprocity, as their locales are those which they defend, while at the same time they are sustained and protected by them.

It is following on and prolonging the implications from this second meaning therefore that partisanship proposes a figure of political organizing that can be efficacious in the present, and this for a number of reasons. The most readily banal is that it carries a blueprint of the relation between the militancy of civil society and governmental power that better matches the current situation than the figure of the 60s activist. Partisans, like fascists, were the product of the economic crises of the 20s and 30s, which first revealed the many aporias and structural violences still at play in liberal bourgeois republics, the myth of eternal growth and the progress of modernity, and the idea that capital could eventually create widespread wellbeing for the majority of the populations, even in those parts of the world that stood to

profit from its global predation. For partisans, the choice of political militancy readily coincided with rejecting the framework of the law and pursuing a different kind of justice, a criminalization that is becoming an increasingly widespread experience for those who engage in civil disobedience, even in formally democratic countries.

And finally, a third reason why this figure might carry a new significance for the present has to do with the fact that partisan struggles came together in a climate of urgency and fear, not one of expansion and experimentation, where both trust in the benevolence of governmental forces and belief in economic and technical solutions to widespread suffering were no longer available to most of the people effected by the war.

In this respect, to revisit the stories of the European resistance - how it came together, how it structured itself as a resilient phenomenon, how it dealt with the wide variety of political positions within its ranks, and what the choice of partisanship meant for individual biographies - can be a generative exercise. Generative, that is, in the double meaning of the term, a first to do with generational vicissitudes, marking the passing of time and the return to an idea of partisanship that is not stale repetition of its past forms, and generative in a second sense of an active bringing into being¹. Yet, if it is to be so, it must be undertaken away from (and in opposition to) the glorifying, mummifying celebratory tones of much of official memorializing².

PARTISANS WELFARE

This process of reactivation of the figure of the partisan however carries a risk, that of basing a new imaginary only on the more readily muscular, eventful and guerrilla-like episodes of that history, while neglecting the significance that the partisan resistance had for the formation of a political sensibility of a new kind, one that responded to the totalitarian aspiration of Nazi-fascism on the life of its subjects with the proliferation of an astonishing

¹ I borrow this from the reflection of Iris van der Tuin, cf. *Generational Feminism: New Materialist Introduction to a Generative Approach*.

² See for instance Christos Giovanopoulos in the present volume: “ [...] with the Syntagma Square movement, there was no celebration. Nobody could go there and say “Oh, this is us, this belongs to us, to our ideology”, regardless of the affinity and sympathy you had for he experiences of the occupation of the squares. [...] Also, usually you celebrate or you like to remember things that you feel you miss, that they are dead, but I think that the spirit of the Syntagma Square movement is still alive, and you still fight for it everywhere.”

variety of practices of concrete, situated solidarity. Marx saw solidarity as one of the “splendid results” of the sociality of workers gathered to smoke, eat and drink together after (and against) work. In working class taverns and cafes, he observed, solidarity was an “observable process” with a bodily dimension: here, “the brotherhood of man is no empty phrase but a reality, and the nobility of man shines forth upon us from their toil-worn bodies” (Marx 2012 [1844], 44). Antonio Gramsci similarly described the social solidarity of the working classes as a vibrant and sensual affair: the “institutions of social life of the exploited working class” provided an essential infrastructure “of feelings, instincts, thoughts, customs, habits, and attachments” (Gramsci 1997 [1971], 152) for fostering revolutionary capabilities. In this sense, partisanship can be thought of as a register of solidarity, as the latter comes to mean mutual interdependence of “a particular assembly of bodies in time and space and of these bodies and their movement together as generative of political feeling and action” (Muehlebach 2017, 100).

Indeed, social work in the aftermath of WWII was a hot political subject area, not only or chiefly for its costs and how to fund them (like it is under neoliberalism). As the partisans emerged from over 20 years of fascism, they remembered very well that its project grew through a gradual infiltration and take over of the main institutions that regulate social life: not only the obvious schooling and unionizing, but also health and insurance provisions, holidays and weekend leisure, fashion and architecture, and so on. The welfare provisions of fascism had been part of its total political project, aimed at a micropolitical re-orientation (Kelly 2017) of subjectivities, and at the possibility of a minute reshaping of relations between the state, society and the individual.

The discussion around the very meaning of social work as collectively organized and maintained through reproductive labour became central in the after war years. In contrast to the paternalistic welfare of the fascist state - who in Italy for instance had sent ‘social assistants’ into factories to help workers dealing with basic requests - but also to the religious model of charity, the former partisans across the continent were imagining social work as a continuation of the experience of the laic concrete solidarity of the resistance during the conflict. For instance, since 1945 the *Unione Donne Italiane* (UDI), the national association of former partisan women, and the Communist Party begun to self-organise and self-manage a large scheme of foster care for children belonging to families severely affected by the war, most of them from the south of the country. This initiative was entirely based on the solidarity of the comparatively better off families from the north, and the organisational intelligence of committees throughout the country who dealt with the logistics of train transport and hospitality for the kids along the way. In this manner, more than 70.000 children were

hosted for variable lengths of periods by northern, working class families, until 1952, while their parents got back on their feet³.

In this context, partisan social work had to be thought as a specific modality of political militancy, alongside that of the political organizer and the trade unionist. But while the task of the latter two is to keep workers angry and citizens indignant towards the injustices at play in the workplace and in society, the difficult task of social work is to find a mode of praxis that helps people to live better in their given environments, while avoiding becoming institutionalised into conservative quietism. While political agitators must tap into the sadness and frustration felt by those oppressed by power, social work's contribution to a politics of liberation has to proceed from a different range of experiences: the glee of finding concrete reliefs to everyday problems, learning new grammars of agency. And such agency -for the partisans who, in the period after WWII, were dreaming up the contours of a new public welfare - was inspired by the principles of collectivity and autonomy of the resistance. In the context of the new peace, it was intended to manifest itself as a constellation of institutions of civil society run democratically and autonomously. The point was to break the nexus between the provision of mutual aid and authority as much as possible, by creating a new subjectivity modelled after the values of the resistance.

In the French context, partisan views of the role of social services found for a season a way of becoming embedded in post-war institutions. This was the ethos that gave rise to institutional pedagogy and institutional analysis. François Tosquelles fought against Franco within the Spanish Civil War, before becoming the director of the Saint-Alban Hospital in France, where “the interweaving of the Resistance and the hospital was so tight that the recruitment of interns was closely linked with the local Resistance network” (Dosse 2011, 42). Fernand Oury, one of the founders of institutional pedagogy, and his brother Jean Oury, who later became the director of La Borde, also experienced their formative years in a France torn between Pétain and the Fronte Populaire (Arran, 2014). Franz Fanon was active in the Algerian resistance to French colonial rule. In the years immediately following the war, these were among the former resistance fighters who had the opportunity to occupy official positions inside public institutions, such as schools and asylums, where they could experiment and develop modes of care aimed at fostering self-organization. For Fanon, who saw Nazism as a force that “converted the whole of Europe into a true colony” (Fanon 2011, 502), the importance of not conflating the experience of resistance with that of armed struggle was a

³ This story has recently been brought to light again in the documentary film *Pasta Nera* (Alessandro Piva, 2011) released in September 6, 2011, at the 68th Venice Film Festival.

constitutive element of his enquiry into the formation of a liberated subjectivity capable of affirmation. Paraphrasing Franco Basaglia, another ex-partisan who understood his engagement with public welfare as a continuation of his resistance, in the encounter with differential states of need and vulnerability, the offer put forward by an institution is never neutral, as it is what shapes the demand for it. Tosquelles, Oury, Fanon, and later Guattari and the many others who became involved in various experiences of institutional analysis, understood that infrastructures, institutions and collectivities at large are not located outside of the self, but rather express its different dimensions. And since institutions (and infrastructures we might add) are made and remade through relations, they require a constant process of reflection to bring to the fore the unconscious and conflicting desires that they inevitably conjure up. The experience of institutional analysis after the war was precisely focused on developing practical tools for experimenting with a care of the institution, to support practices of study and thought as an active and reflective elaboration of experience. This is a fundamentally democratic practice, as the construction of a radical social imaginary is a form of infrastructure (Berlant 2016). Within the discourse of institutional analysis, such research has been named 'implication' (Montecchi 2012). As a way of mapping the situated connections between different dimensions of political experience, implication provides an antidote to both localism and universalism; its knowledge is, in other words, a process of scale-making. Becoming actively implicated thus means to become accountable for those elements that always already determine one's position within a specific field of action. It means to explore the effect that our multiple and at times contradictory forms of belonging have on our actions and feelings, recognizing that they cannot be resolved by individuals and their conscious wilfulness alone. For Guattari, to hold space for this process of ongoing analysis within organized collectivity was a crucial way of taking care of the dimension of "group phantasy", which is not the same as "any sum of individual phantasies, or the phantasy of a particular group", but marks the point when the ongoing process of unfolding of both social reproduction and socialization generate techniques for identifying and expressing a collective sense, a "kind of collective currency" (Guattari 1984, 38), that orients desire along particular assemblages. In Guattari's famous distinction between subject and subjected groups, there are 'subordinated groups', processes who struggle with this process, and allow "basic" phantasies solidify in institutional objects that are never questioned (roles, aims, modalities, slogans, etc.). Vice versa, for a collective process to produce what Guattari calls "transitional" objects, it is necessary for the group to "keep asking whether it is right, whether it should be totally transforming itself, correcting its aims and so on", inventing practices that he compares to an "animal in the moulting season" (Ibid., 40). Guattari's theory refuses the idea that fantasy is constructed merely in the sphere of the symbolic or the dream. Instead, the

social is the site of an extremely concrete desiring production:

“There is no such thing as the social production of reality on the one hand and a desiring production that is mere fantasy on the other...*There is only desire and the social and nothing else*” (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 29. emphasis by the authors).

It is in practices that the nexus between the real of desire and that of the real becomes articulated, and therefore, it is important to understand the dimension of group fantasy as that which generates individual strategies of progression within a given situation, as a way of formulating the question of what comes next within a given social assemblage (a term that Guattari will begin to prefer to that of group from the early '70 onwards, as a way of sidestepping the tricky distinction between individual and collective subject that the term ‘group’ still evokes – cf. Young 2013, 34). In the current crisis, it is becoming apparent that the neoliberal consensus based on the apparent liberal neutrality of many social mechanisms is increasingly inadequate to hold together social forces and to mask the civil war at play. This might be a symptom of the fact that the fixed ‘institutional object’ of the group fantasy appears ripe for being called into question through self-directed actions that inscribe new meanings onto the organization of social reproductive functions. To put it differently, the emerging contours of a partisan social solidarity in the current moment clearly articulates the stakes of allowing processes of self-organization to remain open to the complexities and ambivalences of desire, to resist the reduction of politics to an exercise of commonsensical interests, and to persist in the exercise of solidarity as a source of pleasure.

CULTURAL WORK / SOCIAL WORK

Social work has long provided the antithesis of good art (Jackson 2011). Yet, with the dismantling of sources of public funding across the continent (however partial and imperfect they may have been), many artistic practices are finding themselves wondering about their place as social practices more broadly defined, the alternative being to become offers on the market. This question does not go away even for those who do not see their mode of artistic production as a social practice per se. The issue of how to sustain the production, circulation and more importantly the meaningfulness of one’s work is a preoccupation for all interested in minoritarian forms of expression that do not readily translate into spectacular formats of mass entertainment.

The rise of the extreme right challenges liberal assumptions that still traverse the composition of social movements, such as the belief that politics is something that happens in the public sphere (leaving the private unchecked – see Barbagallo and Federici, 2012); that fascist propaganda can be affectively challenged through fact checking (a painful lesson learned from environmental struggles), but also the positing of the *demonstration* as the culmination and exhaustion of a cycle of organizing. This is because the current state of crisis is a collapse of the *oikos*, of ecology just as much as economy, and not simply one of the bourgeois institutional apparatus. Rather than rejecting these, along with a moralistic condemnation of the liberal subjectivities that they move to action, what seems important is to focus attention around the ways in which current political forms of organizing are becoming prefigurative. This means a refusal of the injunction – easily triggered by the conditions of emergence imposed upon society – of remaining realistic, and a persistence in not leaving behind the more experimental and speculative components of resistance. Not to do so would be a missed opportunity, not only to work collectively towards a different political imaginary, but also to figure out how imaginaries can be collectively produced and taken care of.

The shift from demonstrative gatherings to occupations already pointed in that direction. But it was the shift from the occupations to what came after that has been even more crucial, as instituent practices have been germinating precisely in the moment of disassembly, often overlooked in the discourse around such processes. This did not mean a simple inversion of emphasis from the ambit of production to that of social care, and it continues to play out as a resignification and reorganization of the meaning and modalities of the latter, as a lens, possibly the only one, through which to reassess the former. This moment of disassembly has been particularly powerful in Greece.

GREEK SOLIDARITY AS GROUP PHANTASY

The last communiqué from the multitude gathered in Syntagma Square read: “Syntagma Square is us and we are everywhere.” And while similar promises have been released countless times before in the history of occupations, this time it seems to be actually the case, as the process of disassembly generated a new kind of movement which gave itself the name of ‘the solidarity movement’, revealing of deep connections with the experience of partisanship as described above. The original Greek expression expresses this even more clearly as, I’ve been told, it connotes a sense of ‘closeness to each other’ that evokes the embodied sociality described earlier as a sensible experience. Speaking of the aftermath of the Spanish 15M,

which saw a comparably formidable (albeit distinct) proliferation of solidarity currently embedded in the network of citizen-led municipalities, Amador Savater expressed the different quality of this political experience, contrasting the classic idea of politics as *theatre* (representation) with the notion of a *second skin* (sensitivity):

The events of 15M spreads throughout society a kind of "second skin": an extremely sensitive surface in and by which one feels as his own what happens to unknown others [...] A space of very high conductivity in which the different initiatives proliferate and resonate with each other without referring to any agglutinative center [...] An anonymous coating or film where unpredictable, ungovernable currents of affection and energy circulate happily through established social divisions (sociological, ideological). (Savater 2015).

Indeed, the antecedents of antifascist resistance are also to be found more openly in connection with the current Greek situation, as its citizens found out that financial capital is now able to treat all territories as colonies. The wave of protests that brought down the Papandreou government in 2011, for instance, sparked on the 28th of October, the national memorial day of the OXI (NO) to the fascist regime in 1940. Moreover, the anti-Nazi partisan resistance of ‘National Solidarity’ plays a role in the legitimization of the current movement (Kolokotronis 2016).

The significance of this movement has been somewhat downplayed in much left wing commentary, which often treats its political import mainly in terms of a social opposition to the austerity measures imposed by the Troika. The media has often asked whether it can indeed be seen as a movement at all, and not a mere measure of response to an emergency, supplementing the work of NGOs and replacing the welfare state. However, according to Christos Giovanopoulos, it can indeed be seen as a challenge to both models of governance: it “differs from charities, NGOs, and the ‘civil society’, which are usually in pain [sic] to claim their apolitical, or, non-governmental (supposedly independent) role” (Kolokotronis, 2016), and at the same time, rather than substituting itself for the former role of welfare state, it serves as a process for reclaiming its resources for deep democratic institutions self-organized around popular participation.

On this level, to grasp the significance of the solidarity movement, beyond the merely economic urgency of surviving the relentless financial predation that is still unfolding in the country, means to become interested in the kinds of subjectivities such networks of diverse

and collectively managed organizations are able to foster, fighting the emergence of microfascism ignited by neoliberalism and its psychopathologies (on this, Mark Fisher provided an invaluable insight, describing them as a mixture of sadism and anorexia (Fisher 2015)). To put it differently, the solidarity movement is making us remember, like a patient teacher, once more, that there is not, and never was, such a thing as a pure economy; that all economic processes are libidinal too, intimately connected with appetites and imaginaries.

CONCLUSION: REPAIRING SOCIALITY

Among the myriad initiatives that are confronting the current crisis of care (Fraser 2016) by reinventing social reproduction away from the private and the commercial spheres, there is one aspect that I believe addresses the specificity of cultural, artistic and creative practices too. What would it mean for practitioners to re-valorise art and culture, not as kinds of specialized production, but as elements of a broader process of partisan social reproduction? I would like to suggest that one possible answer could be to use these as ambiances able to replenish the imaginal life of collectivities implicated in situated struggles. The premises for this enmeshment would carry a different ethos from those artistic apparatuses that treat the social in the same way in which extractivism (Acosta 2013) relates to nature, that is, as a resource from which to take what is needed, as a topic, something to memorialize or illustrate. History shows that during processes of disassembly, when organizing becomes more implicated and thus less infused by the affective effervescence experienced in multitudinous gatherings, group dynamics risk becoming more frail vis-à-vis the ghosts that traverse them, such as mistrust, fears, exhaustion.

The terms of involvement thus risk becoming more demanding, sacrificial. Reflecting on this problem, Lauren Berlant recently pondered upon the fragility of concepts such as that of the common, so crucial for bringing together many different struggles, when they are used as keywords, obfuscating rather than encouraging the necessity to further think together the organizational texture of a more equal reorganization of the social. She writes:

The repair or replacement of broken infrastructure is... necessary for any form of sociality to extend itself: but my interest is in how that extension can be non-reproductive, generating a form from within brokenness beyond the exigencies of the current crisis, and alternatively to it too. (Berlant 2016, 393)

In this useful proposition, what comes to the fore is a need for rethinking infrastructures, which Berlant described as specific kinds of institutions that regulate - and are shaped by -

movement, and an urgency to find modalities of repair that renounce the comforting appeal of restoration (a form of repair that aspires to return to a previous condition seen as optimal). Such a problematic puts forward the need for situated practices that intervene in the present crisis in affective ways, at the level of infrastructures, but that are at the same time processes of research and reflective speculation. The proposal I'd like to put forward in this text is that such prefigurative practices, that is practices that strive to develop a congruency and a resonance between their approaches to organizing social reproduction and production and their tactics for an effective political resistance, put forward an epic of implication that can be both against and beyond the brokenness of the present.

I suspect that the question of collective pleasures, the experiencing of the presence of others as a source of glee and cheerfulness, has deep, important relations with the directions that collective desires can take. To provide occasions for such experiences within broader processes of social care and solidarity seems a significant adventure to undertake in the reconfiguration of social reproduction as a common. Under the current deflagration of capitalism, the common as pleasure is sequestered as a resource for profit, creating that disconcerting effect of being "alone together" that Sherry Turkle (2011) analysed so well. Even the private sphere seldom manages to sustain it as a source of independent richness, with friendship and intimate relations being put under increasing strain by precariousness and individualism. Individualized subjectivities are increasingly compelled to think of the networks that support their social reproduction and the networks that support their social pleasures as distinct, and separately provisioned. In the mode of conviviality prefigured in the large occupations against austerity, these two aspects have instead been dramatized together. Here, artistic, cultural and creative practices could have a lot to contribute, not as some special kind of action, but as a care for the social reproduction of the imaginary of sociality as common. Indeed, following Michel Foucault's exhortation from his guide on how to lead a non-fascist life (1983), we should not:

Think that one has to be sad in order to be militant, even though the thing one is fighting is abominable. It is the connection of desire to reality (and not its retreat into the forms of representation) that possesses revolutionary force. (Foucault 2000 [1983], xii).

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